



The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door

Jay Pathak , Dave Runyon , Randy Frazee (Foreword)

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What if Jesus meant that we should love our actual neighbors?

When Jesus was asked to sum up everything into one command, he said to love God with everything we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Most of us have turned this simple idea of loving our neighbors into a nice saying, putting it on bumper stickers and refrigerator magnets and then going on with our lives without actually putting it into practice.

What would happen if every follower of Jesus took the Great Commandment literally? Is it possible that the solution to our society's biggest issues has been right under our noses for the past two thousand years?

The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door Details

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Jessica says

I may actually give this book about 3.5 stars. I appreciated the kick in the kiester.

While the content was basically good and encouraging there were some pacing issues in the book that really kind of grated on my reading nerves. Also the over use of the term "lean in" -- I'm may or may not be a slightly jaded former full-time campus minister that is over buzz word ministry terms. Shoot me now. There are parts that are repetitive that could pare down the book a bit more making this an even more succinct book to encourage us to love our neighbors. While I have generally avoided "how to" books -- this one did not belabor the issue (too much) for hundreds of pages.

I appreciated the encouraging stories, the block map challenge, practical and simple ways to move out and to love our neighbors. I think at time as believers we can try to get out of this by saying our family is our neighbor and we need to work on that. While that is true we still need to be looking to care for the other people that God has placed closest to us in proximity. This book brought some conviction and thoughts on how to move out of my comfort zone.

This could be a quick read individually or could be done in a few weeks with a church group or bible study. Includes a study guide/leader questions in the back. Simple to lead for sure.

Favorite line from book:

"We do not love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted."

Amen.

Nicole Morgan says

"We do not love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted."

I would probably give this book 3.5 stars. Really helpful - and sometimes painfully convicting! - book about following Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors. Some practical advice, encouraging stories. Sometimes it felt a little repetitive or trite, but over all very solid book I'd recommend. :)

Steve says

The book is well intentioned and does have some good practical advice for reaching out and establishing relationships with others in your neighborhood. But, much of the advice is common sense and he is often repetitive in the presentation. The book is conversational in tone and uses a lot of words repetitively like "leaning in," "intentional," and "making an impact" The art of hospitality is something every church should foster both among it's members and in the community. The book consists mainly of stories of the authors interactions with their neighbors and lessons learned from these encounters. He also gives some brief

illustrations from Scripture with very little exegesis to emphasize his points. If nothing else, the book did challenge me to think about how little I know my own neighbors and how I might better engage them in ways I had not thought of before.

Jeff Elliott says

Many reviews have suggested that this book is simplistic and common-sense; and they are right. But if that is true why aren't we doing these simple, common sense things?

A few quotes:

“From the city’s perspective, there isn’t a noticeable difference in how Christians and non-Christians neighbor in our community.”(p. 20)

while I was doing a decent job caring for a lot of people in my church, I wasn’t doing a good job of even remembering my neighbors’ names. (p. 24).

When Jesus was asked to reduce everything important into one command, he gave us a simple and powerful plan that, if acted on, would literally change the world. This simple plan also offers us a different kind of life. It’s a way of living that makes sense and brings peace to people’s souls. Whenever we center our lives around the Great Commandment and take very literally the idea and practice of loving our neighbor, there’s great freedom, peace, and depth of relationship that come to our lives. By becoming good neighbors, we become who we’re supposed to be. As a result, our communities become the places that God intended them to be. (p. 25)

I have noticed some striking similarities between the sales industry and how some Christians share their faith. In a well-meaning attempt to “sell” a good thing, we have all heard pastors use high-pressure sales techniques to sell the gospel. “What would happen if you walked out of this room today and were hit by a car and died? Would you go to heaven or hell?” (p. 101)

The “agenda” we need to drop is the well-meaning tendency to be friends with people for the sole purpose of converting them to our faith. Many so desperately want to move people forward spiritually that they push them according to their timetable, not according to how God is working in them. It’s tempting to offer friendship with strings attached. (p. 102)

Our tendency is to put ourselves in positions of power— in this case, always being the one to give. We want to be seen as the capable one with all the resources and answers. But being in a relationship where we allow others to meet our needs is always a good thing. The art of neighboring involves our being able both to give of our time and energy and, just as important, to receive from others. (p. 120)

The challenge is realizing that it’s not about what you do, but why you do it and how you do it. At the end of the day, good neighboring must be an exercise in asking God what to do in any given situation. It’s about being on our knees in prayer, asking for discernment to help in the situations that we encounter. God doesn’t ask us to do everything but he does ask us to do something— which is much better than nothing.(p. 142)

Mark Lickliter says

This was a good introduction to the art of neighboring. Many of the points made in the book seem very reasonable, and loving our neighbor is a part of the Great Commandment. However, Christians must confess that we are pretty lousy at doing this. We don't even know many of our neighbors, let alone love them as we love ourselves. The rest of this review will simply supply some of the more memorable quotes. The bottom line: Read this book, and start making some of the helpful suggestions given on its pages.

The book starts off with an exercise that asks you to fill in a diagram, stating how many of your neighbors you know by name, and some more personal information about them. The statistics are not good. Many Christians acknowledge that "everyone is their neighbor", but the authors of this book show this to be unhelpful.

"If we say, "Everyone is my neighbor," it can become an excuse for avoiding the implications of following the Great Commandment. Our neighbors become defined in the broadest of terms...The problem is, however, that when we aim for everything, we hit nothing. So when we insist we're neighbors with everybody, often we end up being neighbors with nobody." (p. 35)

"Remember, it's easy to become numb to the Great Commandment. If we aren't careful we can take the most important teaching of Jesus and turn it into a catchy saying that we don't live out." (p. 41)

"The number-one obstacle to neighboring well is time...It's vital to take a step back and ask ourselves if we live at a pace that allows us to be available to those around us." (p. 43)

"The first step to taking the Great Commandment literally is to move from stranger to acquaintance in your relationships with those who live nearest to you." (p. 75)

"Jesus didn't tell us to become acquaintances with our neighbors; he called us to love them, and that means we need to have an actual relationship with them...it is impossible to program relationships. All of us can, however, create environments where relationships might develop and grow into something significant." (p. 78)

"Block parties are natural environments in which neighbors will often take steps from being acquaintance to actually being friends." (p. 79)

In the chapter on "Baby Steps" the point is made that, "it's often the small moments that count, so focus faithfully on the small things day in and day out, and over time change can and will happen. Small things have a way of adding up and producing disproportionately great results." (p. 97)

"The Great Commandment is a matter of obedience to those who know and follow Jesus. We don't love our neighbors so they will know Jesus; we love our neighbors because we already love Jesus and trust him. We are called to love our neighbors, even if our neighbors never show any interest in Jesus, because we have made Jesus our highest priority. Again, we are not supposed to love our neighbors to convert them. We love our neighbors because we have been converted. To put it even more bluntly, we don't love people so they will believe what we believe. Many people we love and serve won't ever believe, and that's okay. We just love our neighbors That's it." (p. 113-14)

"The hardest part about loving others is that you can always do more. You can always give more time, energy, and money to those in need. But you can't be everything to everyone, so stop making yourself feel bad about not doing more...God doesn't ask us to do everything but he does ask us to do something--which is much better than nothing." (p. 142)

I read this book because it was strongly recommended by Rosaria Butterfield, whose book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, I had just finished. I also got to see Rosaria speak on the topic of biblical

hospitality, and I think this book would make a great companion to hers. The Art of Neighboring might prove to be too simplistic for some, but I think that is its greatest strength. This book gives Christians something to aim for when it come to living out the Great Commandment that Jesus gave us. It is well worth your time and effort!

Craig Turnbull says

"What good things might happen if you truly got to know the people in your neighborhood and they got to know you?"

That central idea drives this very helpful book by Pathak and Runyon. Whereas some books emphasize the theology of the practice of hospitality, *The Art of Neighboring* fills a much needed gap in Christian writing by providing the nuts and bolts of how you reach out to the community around you.

Beginning with what the authors call a "block map" (that's the 3x3 diagram on the cover, with your house in the middle), they ask the reader to follow a mental exercise and answer three things in each box about your neighbors immediately adjacent to your house: (1) The names of your neighbors, (2) basic information about them that you can't know by looking at the outside of their house, and then (3) their worldview. It's a convicting exercise, and they claim that only about 10% of people can even answer the first question in all eight remaining boxes. Clearly there's room for improvement upon the Great Commandment's outworkings even in our immediate neighborhood.

Conviction set, the book unfolds and answers common objections and helpful starters for reaching out to the communities nearest us with the message of Christ. Whether it's lack of time, a fear of the unknown, deciding on the first step, being able to receive, setting boundaries, or even learning to forgive, Pathak and Runyon answer them all.

What I liked about the book was both its extreme practicality, and its emphasis that neighboring or being a part of one's community is actually just as much an act of Great Commandment obedience as it is a Great Commission obedience.

In other words, I don't look to be in the lives of my neighbors just to 'win' them to Christ, and when they don't respond I move on. I also am intentionally neighborly because it's a loving thing to do and Christ calls me to this.

Consider this quote:

"We don't love our neighbors to convert them, we love them because we are converted."

That message is so needed, and that message was worth the price of this helpful little book.

Mathew says

The Spirit was prodding and convicting my heart the entire time I was reading *The Art of Neighboring*. I have a confession: I know very few of my neighbors by name. I used to know my neighbors to my right twice over but both times those families moved. My oldest daughters plays with the new neighbor's little girl to the right but I haven't formally introduced myself to her parents. I know of some of the other neighbors but not real well. It's a shame. Jay & Dave make a compelling case that we should know them and be

actively pursuing relationships to a varying degree with them. They say,

I also learned that the story of Jesus becomes evident whenever we connect with the people who live closest to us. Jesus said, “Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). The practice of neighboring creates incredible opportunities for us as believers to connect our stories to the stories of our neighbors and to God’s story. (p. 10)

They beginning with their stories. They invited their city officials to meet with a group of local pastors. These pastors wanted to know how they could impact their communities. The officials said the best help the churches could provide was by being good neighbors. Isolation reeks havoc in many neighbors and is attached to many social problems. So simple yet often neglected.

It’s important to note that they argue neighboring should not be seen as an evangelism method (p. 99). Otherwise, we are performing a bait and switch. Our neighbors will feel like we traded being nice for an opportunity to proselytize.

However, Jay & Dave argue inevitably faith will come as life happens and we are connected with others. I have discovered over the last year or two that evangelism feels uncomfortable because we treat it like a three step sales process. Nobody likes that. But when we evangelize through witnessing to the work of the Spirit in our own lives it’s natural and rarely will people deny your experience.

The main rub is when those we have been neighboring with reject our gospeling. If neighboring is an evangelism tool then we stop pursuing that relationship. But if it simply loving others unconditionally then we continue with the relationship.

Jay and Dave then talk about the biblical commands for loving neighbor and root that in this simple art of neighboring. They also address many of our hesitations in doing so--time constraints, fear, etc.

I have to say that both are fears of mine but their approach is balanced. They recognize that you cannot be intimate with every neighbor you have. They suggest being familiar with many of them and develop relationships with a few where there’s a natural connection. They also recognize that we must set boundaries. Good neighboring doesn’t mean we let people take advantage of our family. It means we are there for those who are in need and in conjunction we do not enable or do harm.

The Art of Neighboring is for everyone. All of us have neighbors. All of us have been commanded to love our neighbors. You don’t have to dedicate your life to your neighbors but you should be there when life happens to speak into their lives. Just like the Spirit made a tangible difference in your heart when you were born again, your neighborhood should be different because you are there. They also point out that in many cases you may find some of your neighbors are Christians which provides natural allies in supporting and serving the neighborhood.

Jacob Prince says

Although it’s theological content may not be deep, it’s pragmatics are extremely helpful. Good read on living missionally in your neighborhood. Read it like you watch a captivating documentary- soak it all up and let it inspire you.

Sarah Hyatt says

Really, can we all please just stop verb-ing our nouns? "Being a neighbor" was good enough for Jesus and Mr. Rogers, and neither of them need improved upon.

This book is a lot - A LOT - of fluff and very little substance. It reads very much like the papers I throw together the night before they are due - take all the knowledge you're supposed to repeat, repeat it, switch it around, make it look like you digested it, get an A. Throw in key terms and buzz words. Repeat. You can fabricate the experience of actually processing the information.

The book can be summed up pretty simply - get to know your neighbors. Which is fine advice. Polite, kind, decent. Biblical, probably. Except the Biblical bits of this book are just proof-texting, a few random anecdotes about Jesus thrown in here and there in order to prove a point. They aren't really exegeted at all, beyond "of course this is what it means." There's no attempt to shift from Jesus' culture to the culture of the typical white, middle class American neighborhood because we never leave it in the first place.

After wading through buzzwords and cliches (the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!), the book also contradicts itself a lot. *Stop being so busy, get to know your neighbors, but actually it's okay because all relationships have stopping points, and humans are legos, and ain't nobody got time for all this.*

The "reading list" looks like a compiled list of the most popular and trendy books on... well, everything, really, from the past five years or so. Kind of like a ministry conference table exploded. Unfortunately, these resources - some of them good, some of them overdone, but I'm not reviewing those - are basically better extrapolations of this book. There is nothing new here, no great insight, no new research tying any of these things together. Be a neighbor, Jesus is pretty smart after all LOL, be a story, be a party, Kid President Donald Miller what? I don't know either. Connect! Reach out! Lean in! Think different! Drop the buzzwords and say something of substance.

Evan Hoekzema says

This book was super practical and came at a great time in my life. I was looking for some help as I sought to get to know my neighbors and some easy ways to do it along with a foundation for why it was essential to the life of a Christian. Now I'm taking our church through it too in order to get everyone on board!

Jessica says

I put this book on hold because we've been having problems with one of our neighbors for over a year now. I was interested to see what this book would say about neighbors from a Christian perspective. The book is written by two pastors who were challenged by their community to put into practice Jesus's Great Commandment to "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Luke 10:27) They work with other area churches to coordinate a sermon series about loving your neighbor to encourage their members to be better neighbors. This book in turn encourages the readers to do the same - get to know their neighbors and develop relationships with them. They discuss how seemingly little things can really make a big impact on

someone. I agree with them that today many people don't know their neighbors and we didn't in our last neighborhood. Now we live in a small neighborhood with only 8 houses, so we do know each of our neighbors by name and have spent time with all of them at some point. But, that also makes it harder when one of those neighbors becomes a problem. While they do address "problem neighbors" it's kind of cursory and I would have liked to see more examples and help with this, but mainly because that's my own personal issue right now. Overall, a good book with a great message.

Some quotes I really liked:

[an exercise in the book is to fill out a grid with info about your closest 8 neighbors] "About 10 percent of people can fill out the names of all eight of their neighbors, line a. About 3 percent can fill out line b [Some facts that you couldn't see just by standing in your driveway - where they are from, interests, hobbies, etc.] for every home. Less than 1 percent can fill out line c [in-depth info - career plans, goals, spiritual beliefs, etc.] for every home." (p.39)

"Take another look at Mary. In particular, this one sentence is significant: Mary 'sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.' In Hebrew culture, to sit at someone's feet indicates a relationship between a disciple and a teacher. In that culture, however, women weren't supposed to be students, much less disciples of a rabbi. They were supposed to be in the kitchen helping fix a meal; a woman's identity was intertwined with her ability to be a good hostess. But Mary defies the cultural norms of her day." (p. 52)

"We don't love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted. And the truth is, many Christians have been taught by well-meaning people that they should do nice things solely for an opportunity to have a spiritual conversation...We are called to love people - period. Whether those people ever take any steps toward God is beside the point." (p. 102-3)

"There is a world of difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Just because we forgive someone doesn't mean we need to be best friends with him. Sometimes a relationship will still be broken, even if forgiveness has been granted. Reconciliation is the hard work of how we go forward together, whereas forgiveness is an attitude of the heart. We should offer everyone forgiveness, but we will not be reconciled with everyone we have wronged or who has wronged us." (p. 163-4)

"Neighboring is not always about being happy and comfortable; it's about allowing God to polish off rough edges. Maturity happens when you put yourself in the place God wants you. Don't run because there's adversity. Maybe God wants to use the adversity to make you more like Jesus." (p. 168)

Chris says

What would happen if we all took the Great Commandment to love our neighbor seriously?

This book is essentially an exploration and field manual of that question, but does so through the lens of literally being a good neighbor to those living nearest to you. Very little of what you read within will shock you (learn the names of your neighbors, invite them to block parties, do favors without expecting any in return,) but there are many sections where the author articulates things that you may know intuitively, but reading it in plain, clear language serves as a bit of a wake-up call (conquer the fear of the unknown, navigating conflict resolution, having integrity in all areas of your life).

I wouldn't hesitate passing this book to anybody in my Church who seeks to build stronger relationships to those around them, and who want to create opportunities for their neighbors to ask them for "a reason for the

hope that is within them." (1 Peter 3:15).

Ruth says

This was a challenging read. I haven't decided yet how I'm going to put some of the suggestions into practice, but I'm going to work on it.

Diane says

This was a practical , thought provoking book. We can change the world by caring for our own neighborhood and encouraging others to do the same

Carie says

I skimmed through most of this book. I have recently moved and have a goal of belonging to a community. So, I really want to have good relations with my neighbors. Our one neighbor kept mentioning that they are both private people. However, their children kept coming over to our home to play so I chose to befriend the parents. After a few hurtful words from the mother, I realize that they are private people and I need to give them space. I took it very personally, but after reading this book, I realized it is not me. Because of this situation, Chapter 10 really spoke to me. I need to invest my time wisely with those that appreciate it and are open to having a relationship. Very freeing to me to read!
